

CHAPTER XLH

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING

WHEN the War broke out, Britain occupied a position of overwhelming superiority in the sphere of mercantile shipping. At the beginning of *Ourpre-War* 1914, nearly 40,000 vessels of all kinds flew the British flag. That figure of course included a very large number of small craft—fishing boats, trawlers, drifters, tugs, lighters—which proved to be not without their crucial value in the War. But of steam vessels of over 100 tons there were 10,123 on the registers of Britain and her Dominions, with a total gross tonnage of 20 million tons. Not far short of one-half of the shipping tonnage in the world was British. Step by step, as the War developed, as the commitments of the British Government for equipping and reinforcing our armies overseas grew *Growing need* heavier, as the imports of stores to this country for Government purposes increased in volume, as the demands of our Allies for shipping tonnage became heavier, as the inroads of the German U-boat campaign diminished the available tonnage, and as the output of mercantile vessels from our shipbuilding yards dropped, the control by the Government over British shipping was extended, and the need for co-ordinating the various controls and forming a Department for administrative purposes became imperative.